

Understanding Soft skills - Life Skills Development through syllabus in University Education

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Abstract : *This is the high time to realize the need for developing specific courses that help in the over-all growth of the personality of the students and train them about the requirements at their workplace. Soft skills-life skills are not a fad at all. Our education system and mindset have been oriented towards knowledge and expertise and the focus so far has been on qualifications that boast of specialization in various fields. The institutions have focused on mapping the skills of students and how these skills can fuel the entrepreneurial venture. But very less initiative has been taken to inculcate communication skills and various business ethics within students so as to compete at global platform. Students coming from various rural and cultural backgrounds face complexities in varied forms to function globally as they lack excellent communication and presentation skills, and are unable to exhibit their ideas, thoughts, and talents in full col ours, resulting failure of entrepreneurial ventures. Thus, developing soft skills-life skills (leadership, decision making, conflict resolution, and presentation skills) through restructuring the syllabus can definitely boast humility and self-confidence within students can generate integrity in speech and actions, sensitivity to context, focus on outcomes and process and continuous learning. Resulting optimized balance between studies, soft skills-life skills and leading to accumulation of social and financial capital.*

Key words: *soft skill-life skills, culture, training, education.*

Introduction:

In the changed global scenario, the personnel are supposed to work at the international level. So, its responsibilities and liabilities have increased manifolds. In the interest of making students fully aware of their social responsibilities and better able to consider related factors in the decision-making process, institutions must pursue with course work in the humanities and social sciences as the integral part of educational program. With this objective in mind, several courses of literature, communication skills, and social sciences were designed and taught to technocrats; to develop a complete “self”, to understand and appreciate the different literary forms, fine arts, society and culture. The inputs of economics, financial management, professional ethics and entrepreneur development are also important to carry out business activities efficiently. But, due to technological revolution, drastic changes in all spheres of human life have taken place. The developments of soft skills - life skills among the skills have become very important. Employees are supposed to work in global scenario that is much more demanding and so the individual is required to cope up with these demands. Due to globalization, technocrats face few major problems, first, to cope up with the technological changes and secondly, to adjust with the problems and stress due to different environment. This is the high time to realize the need for developing specific courses that help in the over-all growth of the personality of the students and train them about the requirements at their workplace.

Need for Soft skills - life skills Training:

Soft skills - Life skills play a vital role for professional success; they help one to excel in the workplace and their importance cannot be denied in this age of information and knowledge. Good life skills in the highly competitive corporate world will help you stand out among hundreds of routine job seekers with mediocre skills and talent. Once you have joined a company too, soft skills - life skills will be significant for both you and your company. The more life skills

that you exhibit in your workplace, the greater and faster will be your career growth. This is especially true in the BPO, ITES and related industries. When a fresh batch is recruited by a company, the entire batch is on a level playing ground. All of them are equally qualified. How then does the differentiation happen in terms of promotions? It happens one, based on the work deliverables but it also is dependent upon the intangible 'soft skills - life skills' that the person exhibits. In today's competitive world, academic knowledge is not the only ingredient to excel in life. For an individual to be a part of the working community or the world academic circle, it is essential to have an attractive personality; a personality that doesn't need words to make its presence known. A well-rounded personality is one that has a confident countenance, an assertive yet likable way of speaking and a nature that attracts people naturally.

Components of soft skills - life skills:

UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO list the following core life skill strategies and techniques as: problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy and coping with stress and emotions. Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence are essential tools for understanding one's strengths and weakness. Consequently, the individual is able to discern available opportunities and prepare to face possible threats. This lead to the development of a social awareness of the concerns of one's family and society. With life skills, one is able to explore alternatives, weigh pros and cons and make rational decisions in solving each problem or issue as it arises. It also entails being able to establish productive interpersonal relationships with others. Life skills enable effective communication, for example, being able to differentiate between hearing and listening and ensuring that messages are transmitted accurately to avoid miscommunication and misinterpretations. Depending on the socio-cultural context, age group etc, and the specific life skills needed for an individual at certain moment and context. Therefore it is not possible to draw a definitive list of essential life skills. The International Bureau of Education focused on four pillars of learning (a) learning to know, (b) learning to do, (c) learning to be and (d) learning to live together-and the following are some cognitive personal and interpersonal life skills that are generally considered particularly important.

LEARNING TO KNOW - Cognitive abilities

- Decision making/problem solving skills
 - Information gathering skills
 - Evaluating future consequences of present actions for self and others
 - Determining alternative solutions to problems
 - Analysis skills regarding the influence of values and attitudes of self and others on motivation
- Critical thinking skills
 - Analyzing peer and media influences
 - Analyzing attitudes, values, social norms and beliefs and factors affecting these
 - Identifying relevant information and information sources
- Skills for increasing internal locus of control
 - Self esteem/confidence building skills
 - Self awareness skills including awareness of rights, influences, values, attitudes, strengths and weaknesses
 - Goal setting skills
 - Self evaluation/self assessment/self-monitoring skills
- Skills for managing feelings

- Anger management
- Dealing with grief and anxiety
- Coping skills for dealing with loss, abuse, trauma
- Skills for managing stress
 - Time management
 - Positive thinking
 - Relaxation technique

LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER - interpersonal abilities

- Interpersonal communication skills
 - Verbal/Non verbal communication
 - Active listening
 - Expressing feelings; give feedback (without blaming) and receiving feedback
- Negotiation/refusal skills
 - Negotiation and conflict management
 - Assertiveness skills
 - Refusal skills
- Empathy
 - Ability to listen and understand another's needs and circumstances and express that understanding
- Cooperation and team work
 - Expressing respect for others contribution.
 - Assessing one's own abilities and contributions to the group
- Advocacy skills
 - Influencing skills and persuasion Net working and motivation skills.

Knowledge of culture and multi-culture is becoming must, as students are more than ever confronted with international realities. Training individuals to recognize cultural differences and linguistic diversities, and to use those differences to create advantages for the organization is an approach that greatly facilitate, and speed up the integration process. Soft skills - life skills are not a fad at all. Our education system and mindset have been oriented towards knowledge and expertise and the focus so far has been on qualifications that boast of specialization in various fields. The institutions have focused on mapping the hard skills of students and how these skills can fuel the entrepreneurial venture. But very less initiative has been taken to inculcate communication skills and various business ethics within students so as to compete at global platform. Students coming from various rural and cultural backgrounds face complexities in varied forms to function globally as they lack excellent communication and presentation skills, and are unable to exhibit their ideas, thoughts, and talents in full colours, resulting failure of entrepreneurial ventures. Thus, developing soft skills - life skills (leadership, decision making, conflict resolution, and presentation skills) through restructuring the syllabus can definitely boost humility and self-confidence within students can generate integrity in speech and actions, sensitivity to context, focus on outcomes and process and continuous learning. Resulting, optimized balance between study and soft skills - life skills and leading to accumulation of social and financial capital. The globalization process has suddenly found us wanting in the area of soft skills - life skills along with hard skills, as these are essential for the success of any individual as well as an organization. Soft skills - life skills, also known as "people skills" includes

communication, listening, engaging in dialogue, giving feedback, cooperating as a team member, solving problems, contributing in meeting and resolving conflicts. Having an overview about soft skills - life skills, we can revert to the discussion that to meet the global challenges, hard core qualification are not enough, but fulfillment of eligibility of having soft skills - life skills has become mandatory which is a pathway to develop an individual's personality that fits him or her best to the job, while bringing boon to the business. Further, in an era of professional complexities, having an excellent IQ is not only the criteria for success in professions, but development of emotional or cognitive competencies with humane understandings has also become vital, which empower an individual emotionally and professionally, rendering over-all success. The real key to the effectiveness of professionals is their ability to put their domain knowledge into effective practice, and in this context, soft skills - life skills have a crucial role to play, thereby enhancing the career prospects. With this, we can state that development of soft skills - life skills has become an integral aspect of professional lives and must be considered and initiated from the root level by restructuring the syllabus, by introducing courses regarding development of soft skills - life skills among students, while preparing them to meet the global challenges and complexities and enhancing their over-all personality. With this view in mind the following courses can be floated to develop the all-round personality of students as:

1. Introducing the concepts of inter-cultural Management
2. Preparing for Expatriation
3. International Professional Communication
4. Stress Management
5. Ecological Environmental Issues
6. Personality Development
7. Philosophy of Science
8. Introduction to Philosophy
9. Industrial Sociology
10. English for Specific Purposes
11. Intellectual Property Rights

Furthermore, soft skills - life skills can be acquired in two forms as: one part involves developing attitudes and attributes, and the other part involves fine-tuning communication skills to express attitudes, ideas, and thoughts as well. Thus, attitudes and attributes form the integral aspect of soft skills - life skills and for achieving global domination, development of soft skills - life skills have become a "must".

Following modules have been proposed for the development of soft skills - life skills among students, which can help students in the over-all growth of the personality and to train and inform them about the requirements of the workplace, which can help them in their selection and promotion in their professional world.

Business Communication:

This includes the opportunity to learn the use of English and other foreign languages for business purposes as: business letter writing, memos, reports and e-mails, rigorous training for oral communication through different modules like presentation skills, face-to-face dialogues, business and social etiquettes, and conversational skills. This would enable students to operate successfully in cross-cultural situations, resulting greater sensitivity and more astute observations of business scenarios, with cultural variations. Further, appropriate use of language leads to international operations as well as cosmopolitan representatives, while reducing culture shock, when on foreign deployment. Hence, encouraging

multilingualism and multiculturalism and terminating the yawning of cultural chasm.

Behavioral Skills:

This includes the development of array of skills which includes role plays, behavioral assessments on the basis of implementation of psychological tests as: personality, attitude, and aptitude tests, which demonstrate the attributes needed for assertiveness, interpersonal relationships, time and goal management, leadership skills and conflict management styles. This also includes assessment of decision-making styles and business ethics of an individual, while moulding an individual to fit best in the job and bringing boon to his or her business.

Acquiring Soft skills - life skills through E-Learning:

The training imparted to develop soft skills - life skills through e-learning includes: role play simulation, simulated dialogues, case studies, audio-enabled learning, and speaking with visuals. This would encourage e-business, which can also bring economic prosperity to organizations irrespective of time, money, and energy. Companies like TCS, Wipro and Infosys run multiple programmes which are used to inculcate leadership skills as well as skills of behaving in certain tough situations. Further, most of the times companies face major shortage of people capable of delivering soft skills - life skills training and have been making to do with CBTs, videos, interactive CDs, consultants or trainers which have good industry knowledge. This has made companies shift towards the e-learning mode, which is cited as a much cheaper and faster method for most hard-pressed individuals. Some well-known e-learning sites in this area are: powerpointers.com, public-speaking.org, presenteruniversity.com, meetingplace.net, and abacon.com/pubspeak which can prove to be a learning platform for the training of employees in soft skills - life skills.

Linguistic Programming for Business Excellence:

The linguistic programming techniques offer excellent training and development capabilities across a range of business needs as: presentation skills, interpersonal skills, change management and nonverbal communication (eye contact, mirroring, body and limb movement posture and stance) and delineates the attainment of excellence in using business communication skills which escalates international business, personal motivation through expression of novel ideas and thoughts, and sharing of information concerning problem-solving techniques, problem identification, and forming of problem-solving teams, and knowledge management.

Developing Leadership and Communication Skills:

Developing leadership skills forms the most vital aspect of developing soft skills - life skills, while influencing group towards the achievement of goal with high initiation and consideration. In a broader sense, we can say that developing leadership styles and specifically transformational leadership style can definitely motivate individual for better performance, resulting of accumulation of social capital in abundance. Concerning communication skills, presentation and face-to-face dialogues must be developed with the aim to articulate a realistic, credible and attractive vision of the future of the business, along developing inter-cultural relations.

Boot Camps for Entrepreneurship Development and Awareness Programmes:

Entrepreneurship has become fashionable term and being an entrepreneur has become a significant personality construct to supersede the global complexities. For this, initiation of boot camps must be made for developing individuals as entrepreneurs who have the ability to see an opportunity and have potential in abundance to bear the risks and failures of the business. The camps must be initiated to encourage executives to be innovative and creative out of the mundane business scenarios. The camps must integrate strategies for developing appropriate decisions-making styles to grab the business opportunity for optimum levels of profits and profit-sharing along with processes and develop competency for

astute interpretation and analysis of financial statements. Various stress management course must be initiated to cope up with the stress caused while facing the turbulent challenges and helping students and executives to manage their emotions at workplace, which could sometimes get disturbed while facing the losses, hence increasing their EQ and attaining emotional stability and ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures.

Dissemination of Data Flow Diagrams or Business Process Model:

Data flow diagrams or business process model must disseminated among students which assist in providing a clear representation of any business function as well as a clear and easy way to communicate. Training must be imparted regarding flow diagrams which forms the new way of information system design and business and the programs must include information regarding entity relationship diagrams, Gantt charts, pert charts, and various projects management strategies. Thus, training of data flow diagrams can prove to be a precursor for improving the performance and personality of an individual as well as of the organization.

Conclusion:

We can conclude that soft skills - life skills are “threshold capabilities” and are necessary but not sufficient requirements. Components as: management, awareness, motivation, and social skills allow individual to become a star performer. And for this, initiation must be made by restructuring the syllabus by introducing courses that develop soft skills - life skills among students, while preparing them to meet the global challenges and enhancing their personality. We can say that, lack of soft skills - life skills is a silent killer as it bleeds a business to death and development of soft skills - life skills would bring “hard” results to business with the experience of “FLOW” along with high intrinsic motivation.

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